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ABSTRACT

Groups exist in a time environment. The group develops, changes, may function for years, and eventually disbands. The theory of groups across time is in a different psychological domain than that of short-term groups. For example, in long-term groups changes in group membership are inevitable whereas in short-term groups these changes are rarely experienced. As a result the time perspective of the group members becomes salient, calls for maintaining a state of equilibrium, and necessitates dealing with strategies of changing membership. Three of the central concepts in long-term groups include continuity (A sense of the relation among the past, present, and future of the group), images of the future, and attachment. The implications of this orientation for theory and research are elaborated. (Author)

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Group Dynamics Over Time

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If we pause to examine the history of group dynamics, it soon becomes apparent the "dynamics" usually take place over an extremely short time period. Indeed, group dynamics may be described as a tempest in a 50 minute teapot, if you will. This state of affairs has moved at least one critic (Wyatt, 1961) to comment that social psychological experimentation implies obliquely, that the world stands still while it is examined variable by variable.

It is time that time becomes a significant variable in social psychology. The revolution in mathematics came when Newton incorporated the time variable in mathematical logic. The shift from geometry to calculus enabled mathematicians to deal with a vast array of new problems. Analogously, social psychology is still in the age of Euclidian geometry. Gurvitch, the author of dialectic sociology (see Bosserman, 1968), long ago suggested that social scientists must focus on the "complexities, sinuosities, flexibilities and constantly renewing tensions, along with the unexpected turn of events of social reality."

The recognition of time as a variable in social psychology makes salient the history of the group, the future of the group, and changes from the past to present and the present to the future. We must recognize, as Wyatt again observed, that history is the none-too-silent partner of most of the events with which psychology is concerned, and now we must add the future as well and the reality of change.

Changing Group Membership

About 20 years ago, I began a series of experiments focusing on changing group membership. On announcing my interest in this area to a colleague, he responded in the usual way. "Ah yes," he said, "I thought about that, but it is too difficult to control."

Actually, the topic of the stranger, group stability, and open systems had already been an area of concern to sociologists, and organizational theorists for some time. Simmel (Wolff, 1950) was one of the earliest inquirers in the area when he examined the advantages of a stranger as a confident. Hemphill recognized in 1950 that stability or change in group membership is one of 15 constructs associatdd with group behavior. Moreover, groups everywhere had developed rituals dealing with changes in group membership.

In 1958 I initiated a series of laboratory and field studies on the topic and summarized this research 10 years ago in a theory paper entitled, "Toward a Theory of Open and Closed Groups" (see Ziller, 1966). Here an open group was defined as an interacting set of persons in a continuous state of membership flux.

Four fundamental characteristics of open as opposed to closed groups were outlined: open groups function within a reduced time perspective; open groups as opposed to closed groups are faced with unique problems of maintaining a state of equilibrium; open groups develop an expanded frame of reference; and, of course, open groups must deal with an endless series of changes in group membership.

It is instructive to return to the topic of open and closed groups from the advantage of the present orientation on time. It was initially proposed that members of open groups are aware of the transitory nature of their membership. The future is indistinct, the present dominates. Implementation of group decisions tend to activated with greater hassle because of the present membership is to benefit from a given group action, the action must be taken in the near future.

Indeed, members of open groups may tend to become self oriented rather than group oriented. In anticipation of changes in group membership, the members may become primarily concerned with transferable acquisitions, things which are

beneficial primarily to the individual mobile member. To counteract this short-term perspective, the group may invoke the concept of a universal group or philosophy or religion. In this way the time span of the group is expanded and a degree of stability is achieved.

Within a time frame of reference, some additional considerations emerge with regard to changes in group membership. It is now proposed that changes in group membership alter the time frame of the group.

Time is a concept invented by man and expressed in terms of some kind of measured change. For example, the relative length or direction of a shadow may serve as a time indicator. Without change, time is rendered meaningless.

If membership in the group remains constant, time is ~~meshed~~ masked somewhat by reduced cues of change. The past, present, and future become fused and diffuse. The advent of a newcomer, however, serves as an event which separates time into categories the past and the present. Furthermore, the future is emphasized because the newcomer represents the forces of change (see Becher, 1950, p. 52). The new child in the family is a case in point, or the new employee in an organization. The hypothesis is readily testable. Furthermore, the departure of a member will reorient the group with regard to time. Here, however, the past may be emphasized, initially at least. The loss of a spouse is perhaps the most pregnant example.

Long-Term Groups

Complexities, senuosities, and constantly renewing tensions also are found in closed groups, particularly if these groups are studied over a time period beyond a few hours. I now propose that it is basic, indeed mandatory, that the emphasis of small group research be placed on the group dynamics of long-term groups.

One of the fundamental classifications of groups by sociologists is the distinction between primary and secondary groups. In one form or another this distinction appears somewhere in the writings of almost all sociologists. In contrast, this concept is rarely found in the indexes of social psychology texts but especially those concerned with group dynamics (see Cartwright & Zander, 1968; Shaw, 1971).

The concept of the primary group was introduced into American sociology by Cooley (1909). Primary groups were described by Cooley as intimate, personal, face-to-face groups including companions and comrades, members of a family, and daily associates. Primary groups include people who are not merely acquaintances of persons we know only by reputation, but those with whom we have a close and constant relationship. The results of this intimate association, according to Cooley, is a "fusion of individualities in a common whole, so that one's very self, for many purposes at least, is the common life and purpose of the group (p. 27)."

Similar classifications of groups have been proposed by Tonnies (1887) in his distinction between Gemeinschaft and Gesellschaft. Gemeinschaft or "communal society" is a society usually of kin where membership cannot be renounced because it involves great emotional meaning for the group and the individual members. The members are born into the society or "grow" into it, or in a more modern sense become attached to it. These bonds contrast with those in Gesellschaft or the "associational society" where the major bonds are voluntary and based upon the pursuit of self interest. People enter these relationships not because they "must" or because it is "natural" but as a practical way of

achieving an objective, such as a business relationship. The Gesellschaft produces the "mass society" whereas the Gemeinschaft fits the folk or primitive society. Similar group classifications have been proposed by other sociologists such as Durkheim (1938) who refers to "mechanical solidarity" and "organic solidarity" and Sorokin (1927) in his distinction between "contractual" relations and "familistic" relations.

A few psychologists have been concerned with the related concepts of the stability of group membership (Hemphill, 1950) or open and closed groups (Ziller, 1965). Here, the rate of membership change is the central issue. For example, in open groups, membership is in a constant state of flux, whereas in closed groups, membership remains intact.

A confluence of the sociological and psychological classification of small groups is proposed here in terms of short-term and long-term groups. The psychological and sociological concepts evolving from the distinction of short and long-term groups and group membership will be introduced, followed by a review of small group research and theory against the background of the short-term, long-term group distinction and leading finally to new directions of research.

A tentative listing of some frequently occurring short-term and long-term groups will help define the problem area. Short-term groups may include juries, ad hoc committees, the usual problem solving groups in laboratory studies, the helping relationship among strangers, groups under conditions of catastrophe, and perhaps audiences in general.

Long-term groups on the other hand, include families, mother-daughter separates, work groups, class members of a one room school as opposed to the usual college classroom, some long-time friends and sports companions or gangs,

and patient-therapist relationships especially under conditions of psychoanalysis. To believe that all or even most social psychological principles apply to both groups is a gross error in abstraction. Is it reasonable to expect helping behavior among members of a family to be similar to helping behavior among strangers? First, however, the distinction between short and long-term groups leads to three concepts which rarely appear in most classic references of small group research, but are central to an emergent theory of long-term groups.

In this incunabular theory of long-term groups three concepts are fundamendal: continuity (or sense of history), images of the future, and attachment (or commitment).

Continuity

Long-term groups exist in a time environment that includes the past, the present, and the future. In order to understand the present behavior of a long-term group, it is essential to consider the history of the group as well as the group's image of the future. The relationship of the perceptions and behaviors of the past, present, and future defines the concept of continuity. To study behavior outside the time field of the history of the group and the group's image of the future is to deny some fundamental characteristic human information processing, such as information storage and anticipation.

As historians have proposed (see Gerschenkron, 1968), continuity is a multifaceted concept. Continuity was defined above as a relationship among

behaviors in the past, present, and future, but the relationship may involve changes and even changes in the rate of change. Thus, continuity is not synonomous with stability or the absence of change, rather the study of group continuity emphasizes the processes or social life en marche. Extrapolating again from the historian's concept (Gerschenkron, 1968), continuity may be described as (a) constancy of direction, (b) periodicity of behaviors, (c) stability of the rate of change.

The concept of ritual may also be interpreted in terms of periodicity. Leach (1969) describes ritual as serving "to remind the congregation just where each member stands in relation to each other and in relation to the larger system. It is necessary for our day-to-day affairs that we should have these occasional reminders, but it is also reassuring."

Thus, continuity may have several meanings. With regard to short-term groups, the concept, of course, is meaningless. Unfortunately, historians may have placed too much emphasis on the past and their concept of continuity may inadequately incorporate the future. As viewed here, continuity emerges from a sense of history, an awareness of the present, and images of the future.

Images of the Future

Short-term groups may be described as present-oriented. The time field is truncated. For long-term groups the past and the future influence the present. The potential influence of the "image of the future" (Bell & Mau, 1971) on present group behavior is a significant topic of inquiry only in the study of long-term groups.

Hilary W. Putnam (The New York Times, 1966: 10E) has commented that the "...future to us seems unreal,...because we can't remember it." Yet the"image of the future" may highly influence the present and indeed, alter the past by providing a new interpretation in view of the image of the future.

Polak (1961) in analyzing the intellectual history of Europe, lays the foundation for a theory of social change based on images of the future. According to Polak, man lives simultaneously in three worlds with respect to time: past, present, and future. Actual past experiences of individuals and groups, perceptions and knowledge about the past of one's particular society and of the human past in general, both history and prehistory, shape what men and societies are in the present.

In small group research, the "image of the future" is expressed as group goals. Cartwright and Zander (1968, p. 402) acknowledge, however, that group goals may be vaguely formulated or not consciously recognized and present problems to investigators who attempt to study natural groups. Thus, most of the research concerning group goals have been conducted with regard to short-term laboratory groups.

Indeed, it is possible that the goals of long-term natural groups are vaguely formulated functionally. If a group goal is clearly defined, it's achievement may threaten the groups reason for being. Thus, disfuse goals serve to maintain the continuity of certain groups.

Again, however, images of the future must be examined in terms of the past and the present. This relationship was expressed by Weil (1952) with perhaps a bit too much emphasis on the past. "To be rooted is perhaps the more important and least recognized need of the human soul.... A human being has roots by virtue of his real, active, and natural participation in the life of a community, which preserves in living shape certain particular treasures of the past and certain particular expectations for the future."

Attachment

In describing primary groups, Cooley stressed the component of intimacy among the members, but he seemed to assume that the concept was self-

explanatory. Others have used related concepts such a nexification (Laing, 1971), loyalty, commitment (Ziller, 1971), involvement, responsivility, meaning, and in-group, out-group boundaries. It is proposed here that a common element among these concepts is that in long-term groups, the self concept of the individual becomes inextrically involved with the concept of other members of the group and the group as a unit.

Clearly, long-term groups are sustained by environmental and social conditions in which the self definition of the individual member is intertwined with relationships within the group. It is in this sense that the group is often described as meaningful.

Studies of Long-Term Groups

This section examines the classic topic of group decision-making in an effort to underscore the implications of the short-term and long-term group differentiation in terms of the concepts of continuity, images of the future, and attachment.

Most studies of decision making groups have been conducted in laboratory settings using short-term groups (see Collins & Guetzkow, 1964). Again the question of applicability of findings to long-term groups must be raised. To what extent have considerations of roles and the self concept, in particular, been neglected in decision making research because of the concentration on short-term groups where these concerns are less significant than in long-term groups?

A study by Torrance (1954) is particularly relevant because it anticipates the results of inquiry by Janis (1972) which suggest some disadvantages of cohesive long-term decision-making groups. Torrance's study involved aircrews who had trained together and were on their way to an assignment in a combat zone (long-term groups).

These groups were composed of a pilot, navigator, and gunner. In one set of groups the original long-term groups remained intact with the three roles included. In a second condition members of the original crews were scrambled and reassembled maintaining the same role structure (pilot, navigator, gunner) but where all the members came from different crews (short-term groups). The crews were asked to solve a series of problems.

The results reported by Torrance revealed superior performances by the short-term groups. The results were interpreted in terms of the inhibiting effects of the explicit military power structure on communication among members. It was assumed that lower status members in the intact crews (long-term groups) hesitated or refrained from critical evaluations of the proposals of high status members leading to less accurate groups decisions. In the short-term groups, on the other hand, the power differential among

members did not have long-term consequences and criticism of higher status members had no implications for the legitimacy of their respective positions in the future. Here images of the future introduce additional considerations for long-term groups which may interfere with optimum problem-solving effectiveness in the immediate situation.

In view of the results, it should not have been too surprising to Janis (1972) to learn that in long-term governmental decision-making reluctance to criticize evolving decision such as the Bay of Pigs decision by the Kennedy administration and the Viet Nam war by several administrations. Indeed, Janis found that roles emerged in these long-term groups which were designed to control the extent and intensity of deviancy from the evolving group decision. For example, a member would approach the deviant prior to the group decision meeting indicating that the time for criticism had passed and that the President of the United States, in one case, needed the support of all members of the decision making group.

One corrective measure suggested by Janis is to introduce outside members to serve as objective contributors. Essentially, the proposal derives from Torrance's study. In long-term groups roles may have a very different modulator effect in the decision-making process. Thus, juries are usually short-term groups, but the dynamics of a jury may change dramatically if it is in tact for a long period of time. The study of long-term juries is a neglected area of research in jurisprudence. Analysis similar to this may be conducted with regard to almost any classic topic in group dynamics.

Implications for Theories of Social Psychology

Throughout it was necessary to introduce new concepts when referring to long-term as opposed to short-term groups. These concepts included attachment, continuity, and images of the future. Similarly, throughout, it has been suggested that theories of social psychology should be reexamined to determine if they are unnecessarily truncated by avoiding the dimension of the concepts listed above and the implications for long-term groups in general. Conflict theory is singled out here, but it would be equally fruitful to discuss others such as attribution theory and exchange theory.

Conflict Theory

It is proposed that the social psychology of long-term groups as opposed to short-term groups demands more open theories such as the theory of conflict because of the continuous process of change involved in long-term groups.

Long-term groups do not stop functioning after the laboratory experiment or following an event or even a concatennation of events. For example, in labor-management negotiations, "attitudinal bargaining" is usually involved. Since essentially the same persons will be involved in future negotiations, the development of a positive working relationship in future negotiations becomes a factor in the bargaining process (Walton & McKennsie, 1965). The long-term group has experienced change, conflict, and adaptation in a long series of cycles, and the group expects these cycles to continue. The guidance and control processes which the long-term group has developed to deal with this chain of conflicts may be expected to be very different than those used by short-term groups. Moreover, the monitoring processes of long as opposed to short-term groups with regard to interpersonal exchanges under stress may be expected to be very different.

A central concept in many of the mini-theories of conflict is the self esteem of the individual or group. Indeed, it has been proposed by some that a threat to the self esteem of a nation is one of the five key causes of war (Levi, 1960). How a group preserves its evaluation of itself as a unit becomes a central concern for social psychological theories of long-term groups. In short-term groups, however, the self-esteem of the members becomes the central concern rather than the self esteem of the group. Thus, very different methods of conflict management may be expected to be effective in long-term as opposed to short-term groups.

Following Horney (1937), it is proposed that conflict may be resolved by moving away from others (withdrawal), moving toward others (problem-solving including negotiations), and moving against others (aggression and violence). Withdrawal and aggressive approaches to conflict management tend to have these things in common: they are readily available approaches (they require little training), highly reliable in their effects, and negatively reinforcing.

Finally, too, violence and withdrawal approaches to conflict management both render the parties to the dispute "fit with an unfit fitness." They become readily skilled at withdrawal or violence and in so doing make it difficult to learn other appraoches to stress.

In terms of short-term as opposed to long-term groups, it is quite likely that short-term groups tend to use withdrawal and violence because the investment required to learn these approaches is less. Direct negotiations, on the other hand, requires extensive contact and intensive interpersonal training. Again, it is suggested that the social psychological theories of short-term as opposed to long-term groups are almost in different domains.

New Directions for Research

A confluence of the study of changing group membership and long-term groups is currently in progress. The author is comparing two organizations. Both are entymological research organizations in the United States Department of Agriculture and both are about the same size and are located in the same community. One organization has been in operation for about 2-1/2 years whereas the other has been in operation for about 35 years. Moreover, the staff of the latter organization has remained together even though at one point it had been necessary to relocate. Even then 45 of the 50 men moved with the organization. The method of study involves examining the rituals associated with the introduction of a newcomer and the departure of a regular member. In this process, the newcomer and egressor act as a trace or probe which highlights the structure and function of long-term groups. Observations at this early stage of study suggest that long-term organizations have developed an abundance of rituals associated with past events.

Overview

Introducing the concept of time in the study of groups leads to the understanding of groups in progress. The meaning of time in open groups is assumed to be associated with changes in group membership. The meaning of time in closed groups or long-term groups is more cyclical and is associated with rituals which help to reaffirm the group identity and boundaries.

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